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R 300859Z MAR 09
FM AMEMBASSY PARIS
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5917
INFO RUEHRC/USDA FAS WASHDC
RUEHZN/ENVIRONMENT SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COLLECTIVE
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SUBJECT: Dr. Nina Fedoroff presents the case for biotech to French

¶1. (U) SUMMARY: During a visit to Paris on March 24 and 25, Dr. Fedoroff, the Science and Technology Advisor to the Secretary (STAS), called on a range of senior French Government officials to argue for basing policy decisions on science-based criteria, especially decisions concerning genetically engineered crops (GMOs). (France's invocation of the safeguard clause to ban the cultivation of GM corn was found to be scientifically unjustified by the European Food Safety Authority.) She spoke with her counterparts at the President Sarkozy's Office and the Prime Minister's office, and with a Deputy Minister at the Environmental Ministry (MEEDDAT), making the case that GMOs have been extensively researched and found safe. She also made a well-received presentation on the need for GMO research now to cope with weather extremes as global climate change impacts traditional agricultural crops, and had a TV interview with France 24, an international network with 50 million viewers. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) On March 24 Dr. Nina Fedoroff, the Science and Technology Advisor to the Secretary of State and the Administrator of AID, accompanied by the Agricultural Minister-Counselor and ESTH Counselor, called on Professor Bernard Belloc, Science Advisor to President Sarkozy, at the Elysees Palace. After explaining that 80 percent of the French oppose GMOs, Professor Belloc admitted that, while the Government of France (GOF) has allocated some 45 million Euros for biotech research, French biotech researchers are frustrated because they are not permitted to conduct field trials, and it is difficult to conduct basic research without application trials. He welcomed the prospect of increased cooperation between American and French biotech researchers comparable to that between French and German researchers.

¶3. (U) In response, Dr. Fedoroff pointed out that the breakthroughs in original GMO research had been conducted in Belgium, Germany and France. Now there is virtually no research. Even the French National Institute for agricultural Research (INRA) cannot fund GMO research on improving grape root stock. She then mentioned that Dr. Claude Fauquet, a French researcher at the Danforth Institute in the US, would come to France in June to highlight how GMOs can help African countries boost food production and cope with increasing drought, Belloc suggested close collaboration with the French agricultural research institution, INRA, and offered to initiate the contact himself.

¶4. (U) In the evening, Dr. Fedoroff made a well-received presentation on "Adaptation of Agriculture to Climate Change: Is there Time?" to the French-American Foundation's two day seminar on climate change, co-sponsored with Stanford University. Citing the great French heat wave in the summer of 2003 that killed 30,000 people, her theme was that we need to use GMO scientific tools now to develop plants that will be more resistant to the increased heat

and drought of previously temperate regions, such as France, as the climate changes.

15. (SBU) The following day Dr. Federoff, accompanied by the Charge d'Affaires and the ESTH Counselor, called on Ms. Chantal Jouanno, the recently appointed Secretary of State for Ecology (in effect a "junior minister") in the Ministry of Ecology, Energy, Sustainable Development and Regional Planning, known by its French initials as "MEEDDAT," and Ms. Dominique Dron, MEEDDAT Counselor for the Grenelle process. Jouanno explained how the complex negotiations called the "Grenelle of the Environment" resulted in a fundamental change in putting the burden of proof of proposed changes on the proposer to show that the changes would be environmentally beneficial. France considers both societal preferences as well as scientific aspects. Dron added that the Mon810 corn GMO has no benefits, but some environmental risks, so a cost-benefit analysis supports the French decision to ban cultivation of pMon810. At this point, France is not against GMOs in general, only against pMon810 (note: pMON810 is currently the only GMO approved for cultivation in Europe.).

16. (U) In response, Dr. Fedoroff pointed out that Africa is the real focus of GMO research because Africa needs increased drought-resistant varieties that use scarce water better. But Africans are guided by European attitudes, and Europeans should not be so inward looking. The Africans would definitely benefit from access to improved plants able to resist extreme weather.

17. (U) Dr. Fedoroff, accompanied by the Agricultural Minister-Counselor and ESTH Counselor, called on Ms. Gaelle Regnard, Agricultural advisor to Prime Minister Fillon at the Hotel de Matignon. The conversation focused more on research. Regnard noted that French biotech industry is hindered by the prohibition on GMO field trials (note: multi-year field trials were allowed to continue in 2008. End note.), and the French industry has been working in India, which is even more receptive than in the US. This contrasts with medicine, where French researchers have excellent links with French clinics for trials of experimental medicines. Dr. Fedoroff suggested considering the same approach that the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) adopted in the 1990s when it set up a Recombinant DNA Advisory Committee that consisted of both scientists and non-scientists to consider issues of biosafety.

18. (U) COMMENT: Dr. Fedoroff's discussions with senior French government officials have opened the door for scientific collaboration on the GMO issue, especially for facilitating the visit by Dr. Claude Fauquet, a French scientist working at the Danforth Institute. This is the most sustained discussion at a senior level than we have had in some time. The Embassy will follow up at the working level, and welcomes the June visit of Dr. Fauquet to Paris under the Biotech Outreach Program for lectures and other Public Affairs Section-facilitated events.
Pekala